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This address points up the critical educational challenge facing state governments today. Stressing the notion of partnership between the Federal and state governments, it notes that states have particularly important opportunities for action in the areas of finance, administration, and leadership. State governments must establish a minimum baseline of educational quality and must tax sufficiently to maintain it. In terms of administration, strong independent state boards of education are necessary, with a strong executive and with freedom from political intrusion. State leadership in education should involve the creation of a positive climate and emphasis. Such leadership should also create conditions which stimulate and encourage educators to innovate and improve the schools. (NH)

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STATE GOVERNMENT AND THE EDUCATION CHALLENGE*

An Address by Harold Howe II
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As a newcomer to government, now rounding out the sixth month on the job, I have been deeply impressed by the readiness of the American public to be helpful. Mail by the bushel basket arrives at my desk daily, providing all kinds of tips on how the Office of Education should be run. Many letter writers take the trouble to suggest where the Commissioner of Education might well take himself, and some even speculate on my life in the hereafter.

I would presume that Governors receive similar advice from time to time and do not feel any desperate need for more. It therefore seems to me remarkably forbearing of Governor Rolvaag to have encouraged me to dip into the subject of "State Government and the Education Challenge." For my part I shall try to avoid getting in over my head.

What I have to say could be summarized more or less along the following lines: The education challenge facing State government today is critical -- not only because there are issues urgently requiring attention but because there is a leadership role that only the States can fill. I am not at all sure that every State grasps the importance

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of the contribution to education it is called upon to make -- or, understanding the dimensions of that contribution, is prepared to respond. The conduct of education in the United States is a partnership, and each partner has a unique and necessary assignment, while sharing the responsibility for the success of the overall enterprise. And I would add that the house of education has many rooms; no one need fear that he is in danger of being crowded out.

This matter of partnership evidently has been stressed by Commissioners of Education ever since the Office of Education was founded 99 years ago, and I have no intention of breaking the chain. The traditional gist of these remarks is that the Federal Government is not out to usurp the responsibilities and prerogatives of the States and local communities in the field of education. I want to reaffirm that position. We want neither your rights nor your headaches. Speaking not just as a bureaucrat but as a professional educator, I believe that the U.S. Office of Education's position in the American education enterprise should remain that of a junior partner.

And I, for one, am delighted that the partnership has now been expanded by the official establishment of the Education Commission of the States. To Wendell Pierce and his colleagues and associates in the new undertaking, I say welcome to the club.

The Commission bears promise of making a truly significant contribution--though I hope I am permitted this reservation: that it not become a refuge for unconstructive extremists of the "states' rights" persuasion. My hope is that it will instead become a lively forum for helping all the States develop more fully those functions which are most uniquely theirs.

At the compact's initial annual meeting last week in Chicago, Governor Terry Sanford -- who of course did so much to bring the Commission into being -- gave a very fine speech containing a couple of lines I find especially provocative.

"I want to see the States, and their local communities, steal a march on the national government," he said. "I want to see every State agency and institution and local school official set out to demonstrate to the national government, and to each other, how excellence and universality might be accomplished."

If the 13 States represented here today can steal a march on the U.S. Office of Education, if they move forward at a pace that leaves us winded, I promise you that the Commissioner of Education will lead the cheering.

Of the various prospects that lie before you, there are three that offer particularly fertile ground for State action. One is the general, troublesome area of finance. A second is orderly administration. And a third is leadership.

Generally speaking, State expenditures seem to concentrate in the fields of welfare, roads, and education. I plead for a fair shake for education. Some of the States represented here are doing very well indeed. On the average, however, midwestern State governments, as distinct from local governments within these States, pay only one fourth of the education bill. In some cases the contribution dips down to 10 percent and less. By contrast, the national average for support of education by State government is nearly 40 percent.

With education as with so many other things, the chances are that you get what you pay for. And what you are getting, judging from the figures, is an inequitable mixture of educational offerings--many

flourishing schools receiving hothouse care in the wealthy suburbs; and many inadequate schools--some in the rural areas and some in the cities or blue-collar subdivisions around the cities--withering for lack of proper support. Responsible State government cannot wash its hands of this unevenness and leave laggard local communities to wallow around as best they can, nor can it relegate to educational mediocrity those areas which are simply unable to pay good teachers and build good schools.

I am not suggesting that you cast a mold into which each educational unit must somehow fit. I do say that State government has the right and in my judgment the obligation to determine--in the long-run interest of the State's progress and prosperity--a minimum level of quality for all public elementary and secondary schools within its borders. Having determined that quality baseline, the States must tax sufficiently to make sure that no school falls below it. If the local community wants to soar above that level, well and good. That is their option, and many will exercise it.

There is nothing startling about insisting on a minimum statewide standard of educational quality. You do much the same thing in a closely related function when you set standards of teacher certification. The goal in both cases is not restriction but achievement--not of imposing absolute uniformity but of making sure that every child receives an education that adequately prepares him for the responsibilities of citizenship.

The spread in levels of support of education by State governments --ranging from less than seven percent of the bill in one midwestern State to more than 55 percent in another--also has implications for the future of Federal spending.

If the day is ever to come when there is general rather than categorical Federal aid to education--and I myself am inclined to hope that such a day does come--there will have to be some kind of reckoning of what the States themselves are doing. It would be neither fair nor healthy, it seems to me, to distribute Federal money with no regard to the degree of enterprise or apathy displayed by the individual State, and I would imagine Congress would feel the same way. I would think it necessary to develop some sort of formula--calling for a reasonable educational investment in terms of the individual State's economy--so that Federal money would be used to supplement State efforts rather than supplant them. In speaking of such a formula I am not necessarily talking about dollar expenditures per pupil but rather of the level of effort made by the State government--the percentage of expenditures allocated to education--relative to the State's ability to pay. Be that as it may, bringing into some coherent and rational order the investment in education, within the States and among the States, seems to me an issue that merits your earnest consideration.

Another and of course not unrelated concern is the matter of State administration of education. From my experience as a school man and more recently as a consequence of our activities under Title V of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act--the section entitled "Strengthening State Departments of Education"--I am convinced that legislative or constitutional changes are needed in many States so as to bring order to some rather chaotic situations. Each State should have, it seems to me, a strong independent State board to supervise elementary and secondary education and another encompassing higher education. These boards should be insulated from immediate political intrusion through the long-term appointment of their rotating membership, thus enabling them to bring continuity and objectivity to the education enterprise. And each should be served by a strong executive--an appointed official responsible to the board itself. Having made that statement I have presumably stepped on at least seven toes, that being the number of States represented here whose chief State school officers are elected rather than appointed. I was speaking of a principle, however, not of individuals. Personalities and professional qualifications altogether aside, it seems to me that removing education officials from the ups and downs of politics makes sound administrative sense. I think it is pertinent to point out that college and university presidents do not run for office; city school superintendents do not run for office; thank heaven the U.S. Commissioner of Education does not run for office; and neither, in my judgment, should State superintendents. These are professional assignments and should be treated as such.

Even if everyone here felt these comments to be wholly sensible and urgently compelling, I know full well that present arrangements are not easily altered. I am well aware of the bitter pulling and

- hauling and the deep emotions that go into a change so relatively minor and apparently reasonable as the consolidated high school. I know that people's feelings are involved, and I make no brief for ignoring those feelings just to achieve cold-blooded, mechanical efficiency. It nevertheless seems to me that we must think in terms of serving all the people, not just the most vocal, including lots of people not yet born. The education officials of your States, if they are like their counterparts elsewhere, are hard pressed to keep pace with the dramatic developments taking place in the technologies and techniques of education, not to speak of the changing needs of the society education serves. Unless your situation is highly unusual, little thought is being given to what your State will be like 5, 25, and 50 years hence ... to what kinds of training people will need to qualify for jobs and to lead happy, productive lives ... and to what the State's educational systems should be doing to get ready.

I cannot say that sprucing up the administration of education will solve all your State's educational problems but it does represent a valuable first step.

The third item I would like to discuss is that of providing leadership for the educational enterprise.

This matter of leadership can be broken down into two broad functions, what I might call content and spirit. The two are interwoven, of course, but perhaps there is some value in considering these twin aspects one by one.

The content of leadership consists in advocating specific ideas, programs, and courses of activity. Since no one has a monopoly on ideas, this component of leadership can come from any source within education or outside it ... from teachers, school principals and board members, parents, or governors.

It is the good fortune of education these days to be blessed with an abundance of idea-proposers, and our schools are already showing the result. The new ideas have attracted support, however, only because the conditions were right for their emergence; a number of people have helped create the proper intellectual and psychological environment for educational ferment.

At the top of any list of such people I would place President Lyndon Johnson, and not just because it is politic for me to do so. I think there can be no question that he has given education the most prominent position in our national life that it has ever occupied... not only because of the legislative program he advocated, but because of the many evidences he has given of his personal concern for education.

Terry Sanford filled much the same role in North Carolina. I single him out because of my own experience with the schools in that State before I became Commissioner. I know that he took the time while serving as Governor, and not just while campaigning for that office, to visit and to speak in every school district in the State, with the specific purpose of showing that he cared about education and the people who were involved in it.

Such actions are examples of providing leadership toward bringing new spirit to education--of stimulating teachers and school officials and parents and the students themselves by demonstrating official and personal commitment to the cause of education. It is in this realm, it seems to me, that governors can make a particularly valuable contribution to the work of educational renewal.

For about 50 years now, school teachers and officials have for the most part lived and worked in the national shade. The last major educational revolution in which they took part was completed about the turn of the century, when the United States achieved the goal of providing free public secondary education to every citizen. It is worth pointing out that we attained this objective decades before any other Nation, and that universal secondary education was perhaps the single most important factor in assimilating millions of immigrants from a hundred different kinds into one people with a single language and a single life.

For many years thereafter, American education was not called upon to perform any task of commensurate national importance. Our schools conducted business as usual, and most American citizens, to the extent that they gave education any really serious thought at all, were sure that the schools were doing whatever they were supposed to be doing with reasonable efficiency.

Suddenly, in the late 1950's, the early Russian successes in the space race taught us that business as usual was not a satisfactory program for the schools. The eruption of civil rights disturbances in the North and South made us realize that while our suburban schools

were educating children for affluence, our inner-city and rural slum schools were training other children for lives of poverty. We had an educational crisis on our hands, and the teacher who had been ignored for so long found himself called on the carpet to explain why Johnny couldn't read.

Today, less than a decade later, the angry sentiments that characterized the atmosphere of education in those days have largely abated. Aided by public attention that flowed from Sputnik and Selma, educators have more public support--in dollars and in spirit--than they ever had before.

Yet there is a danger that this public support will diminish as we become accustomed to living with the perils of our times. The sacrifices we are willing to make at moments of national trial are much less willingly made in years of national comfort, and most American voters today--the white ones, at least--are comfortable. The national determination that inspired the educational revival may run out of steam, even though our schools are a long way from reaching the minimum standards of excellence every one of them should attain.

Here is where the governors of States can help provide the climate that educators need to do their jobs. In part they can do it in some rather obvious ways: by arguing for the laws and the tax support that first-rate education requires, by educating their electorate to the notion that excellent schools are not a gift of the gods but a hard-won prize to be bought and paid for by human beings.

But almost as important, governors can provide a less obvious type of leadership, that of inspiring educators in their work by standing at their side... assuring them, through public statements and personal interest, that you place schools high on the State agenda. Educators today are coming up with new ideas for the schools not because they are a markedly superior breed of human compared to their predecessors of 50 years ago, but because they were encouraged to experiment and suggest. The supply was always there; it was the demand that was lacking. I urge each of you to maintain that demand at a high level by demonstrating a personal interest in the progress of the schools.

I do not urge this course of action as a political gambit or as a courtesy to any shy, withdrawn teachers who need to be cultivated and patted on the head. I urge it as a pragmatic necessity both for your States and for our Nation. Our current concern for economic development has demonstrated the relationship between the quality of a State's educational institutions and its fiscal health. Those States that invest the least in education almost inevitably pay for false economies with a political, financial, and social anemia that grows more marked as other States move ahead in education. It is the citizens of a State who have to pay the bill for education one way or the other, and fine schools seem to be much less expensive than poor ones.

Finally, by injecting vigor into educational renewal at the State level, you will safeguard--much more than any amount of political rhetoric ever can--that tradition of local control of the schools that

has made American education such a rich source of diversity and such a vigorous source of support to American democracy. Some problems related to education--I think, for example, of educating the disadvantaged and of desegregating the schools--are so complex in nature and massive in scope that they demand the attention of the national government. Considering the necessary pragmatism of politics at the local level, it is questionable whether any agency other than the national government could have initiated action against some of these national problems.

But other educational matters have always lent themselves to solution at the State and local level, and always will. Meanwhile we are becoming increasingly aware of others that merit a regional approach. The problems of educating migrant workers, for example, are not peculiar to one State, but to clusters of States in various portions of the country. The States of the intermountain area encounter difficulties in the use of educational television that the Plains States do not. The sparsely populated school districts of the southwestern States have to make quite different transportation arrangements than do their counterparts in the metropolitan East.

Every one of these educational problems demands ingenuity and imagination from the States. Despite the growing importance of the Federal government in education, there is plenty of room for educational leadership in capitals other than Washington. In fact, I would say that the call for ideas from the States is increasing, for as experience with Federal support of education grows, the schools speak not only of needing more dollars but of searching for better ways to use the dollars they have.

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Muscles that are not used soon grow weak. I hope that you will not conclude, from viewing all the calisthenics being performed in Washington these days, that the political leaders of the States can stop doing their own push-ups in behalf of education. Our schools need all the muscles we can give them.

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